



The Story of Kevin Mitnick, the World's Most Notorious Hacker

Mackenzie Wessels

Southern Charleston University

CSCI 405: Principles of Cyber Security

Professor Patrick Hill

October 3, 2023



Introduction

- Kevin Mitnick is often described as "The world's most famous hacker" by media outlets.
- He is a central figure in the history of hacking, with a story that captivates both the cybersecurity community and the general public.
- Mitnick's journey from a teenage hacker to a respected cybersecurity consultant is a testament to the complex and evolving nature of the digital age.

Early Life

- Kevin Mitnick was born on August 6, 1963, in Los Angeles, California.
- From a young age, he displayed an intense interest in technology and computers.
- At age 12, he had already mastered the art of phone phreaking, exploring the telephone system vulnerabilities.





Hacking Incidents

According to an article in Forbes Magazine, Mitnick was arrested several times for hacking.

1981 - Pacific Bell, making his own copies of pacific bells computer manuals

Probation

1982 - University of Southern California, unauthorised access to the school network

Six months jail time

1987 - Santa Cruz Operation, copying software

Three years probation

1988 - Second breach at DEC, copying their VMS mini computer operating system

One year in prison and six months of counselling for computer addiction .
(Forbes, 2013)

Life on the Run

- Near the end of his supervised release, Mitnick was informed about being monitored and then fed information about a system that would let him do counter surveillance.
- Pacific Bell was indeed wiretapping the phone lines, but once Kevin realized he had been baited it was already too late.
- FBI issued a warrant for Mitnick causing him to run away and disappear as a fugitive.
- Mitnick wiretapped phone lines, intercepted communications, and gathered intelligence to stay ahead of authorities.

U.S. Department of Justice
United States Marshals Service

WANTED BY U.S. MARSHALS

NOTICE TO ARRESTING AGENCY: Before arrest, validate warrant through National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
United States Marshals Service NCIC entry number: (NOC) 8721460021

NAME:MITNICK, KEVIN DAVID
AKA(S):MITNICK, KEVIN DAVID
 MERRILL, BRIAN ALLEN

DESCRIPTION:

Sex:MALE
Race:WHITE
Place of Birth:SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA
Date(s) of Birth:08/06/63; 10/18/70
Height:5'11"
Weight:190
Eyes:BLUE
Hair:BROWN
Shirtsize:LARGE
Scars, Marks, Tattoos:NONE KNOWN
Social Security Number (if)350-39-5695
NCIC Fingerprint Classification:J0P920P91301P919P909

ADDRESS AND LOCALE: KNOWN TO RESIDE IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AREA OF CALIFORNIA AND LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

WANTED FOR: VIOLATION OF SUPERVISED RELEASE
ORIGINAL CHARGE: POSSESSION UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS DEVICE; COMPUTER FRAUD
Warrant Issued: CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
Warrant Number: 9018-1118-0114-C

DATE WARRANT ISSUED: NOVEMBER 10, 1992

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION: SUBJECT SUFFERS FROM A WEIGHT PROBLEM AND MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED WEIGHT GAIN OR WEIGHT LOSS
VEHICLE/TAG INFORMATION: BOYS KNOWN OFTEN USES PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

If arrested or whereabouts known, notify the local United States Marshals Office. (Telephone: 213-224-2485)
If no answer, call United States Marshals Service Communications Center in McLean Virginia.
Telephone (800)336-0102 (24 hour telephone contact) NLETS access code is VAUS000000.

FOR YOUR RECORDS ARE OBSOLETE AND NOT TO BE USED

Form USM-101
(Rev. 3/2/92)

November 1992



Capture and Imprisonment

- He was finally tracked down by Tsutomu Shimomura who had been hacked by Mitnick previously.
- FBI then issued a warrant and Mitnick was arrested.
- He was sentenced to four and a half years in prison and 8 months in solitary confinement.



Controversy

- Mitnick was detained without a trial and did not have access to his lawyer.
- During his testimony in front of a Congressional hearing in 2000, Mitnick defended his hacking as non-malicious. “My goal was not to cause any harm. It was not to profit in any way” (GovInfo, 2000, p. 12).
- Theft and fraud guidelines punish based on value of property taken, damaged, or destroyed. Mitnick did not deprive these companies of their software.
- The prosecution asserted that the value of his copied source code was essentially the what the company had invested in research and development

The Release

- While in prison Kevin received a huge amount of support from the public, the free Kevin movement
- Protesters also tried to stop Miramax from producing a movie that paints Kevin Mitnick in a negative light. Takedown (2000)
- January 21 2000 Kevin was released from prison



Mitnick's Contributions

- Kevin Mitnick's post-prison career saw him becoming a respected figure in cybersecurity.
- He founded Mitnick Security, a consulting firm specializing in cybersecurity.
- Mitnick became a sought-after public speaker. Often focusing on the human element





Conclusion

- Kevin Mitnick died July 16, 2023
- Mitnick's story emphasizes the role of social engineering in hacking.
- It underscores the importance of human-centric security measures.
- Cybersecurity is not just about technology; it's about understanding and countering human vulnerabilities.



References

Forbes Magazine. (2013, June). The Troubled Path of Kevin Mitnick. Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/global/1999/0419/0208024s1.html?sh=4db18ae055bd>

GovInfo, U.S. Government Publishing Office. (2000, March). Cyber Attack: Is the Government Safe? GovInfo. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106shrg63639/html/CHRG-106shrg63639.htm>